Preliminary report on the listening process

Busturialdea-Urdaibai

Introduction

This report compiles the initial findings of the listening process in Busturialdea-Urdaibai on the possible expansion of the Guggenheim Bilbao Museum in the area. To date, more than 500 individual interviews have been conducted, five sensemaking sessions have been held, and an exhaustive mapping of the agents and initiatives linked to Sustainable Human Development in the region has been carried out, allowing us to better understand the complexity of this challenge and the depth of the debate.

The narratives collected speak of the environment, memory, economy, mistrust, and hope. They describe a contested territory, with legitimate tensions between conservation and development, roots and transformation, tourism and industry, past and future. This document is an honest effort to understand and enrich the debate. This report does not seek to close the debate, but rather to provide a solid and informed basis for its continuation.

The report is structured in five sections:

I. Theoretical framework. Complex social challenges and socio-ecological transitions.

II. Methodology. Listening, mapping, and collective interpretation.

III. Narratives. Progress of the process to date. Initial narrative patterns identified.

IV. Initial conclusions. Reflections on governance and development.

V. Next steps. Work agenda and strategic recommendations.

The annexes include a detailed description of the working approach, a glossary of terms, and the bibliography used.

Preliminary report on the listening process

Autoría

Agirre Lehendakaria Center for Social and Political Studies (ALCK) is a collaborative project between the University of the Basque Country (EHU) and Columbia University to better understand the Sustainable Human Development model promoted by Basque society since the recovery of self-government and to project it towards the future. ALC is specialized in the design, implementation, and evaluation of community listening processes that serve to promote processes of innovation and territorial transformation.

The Advanced Consortium on Cooperation, Conflict and Complexity (AC4) is the Multidisciplinary Research Institute of Columbia University specializing in addressing environmental projects. AC4-Columbia University has extensive experience in international projects related to environmental conservation and conflict management in Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, Europe and Southeast Asia. In this case, AC4-Columbia University is responsible for the scientific direction of the project. This involves ensuring transparency and methodological rigor, supervising the analysis of the data collected, and validating the results obtained.

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Part I
Theoretical framework

Environmental conflicts as complex social challenges

The 21st century has been characterized by a myriad of social and environmental challenges that are historically unique in terms of their magnitude and level of interconnection. The intensification of climate change, the loss of biodiversity and habitat necessary for the survival of species, and the demand for water and other natural resources are threatening the systems that sustain life on the planet (Portner et al, 2023, Sachs et al, 2024). At the same time, societies around the world are facing growing wealth disparities, rapid and large-scale technological change, demographic shifts related to aging, birth rates, and migration, and political realignments. Government agendas have grown in response to these challenges, with notable examples including the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015), the "30 by 30" commitment to conserve biodiversity and ecosystem integrity (UNEP, 2022), and the Paris Agreement on climate change (UNFCCC, 2015).

Such multifaceted and interconnected problems are referred to as "complex problems." They are defined by the existence of multiple stakeholders and interest groups, each with different perspectives on the problem, with particular goals or solutions, based on their own value systems and definitions (Rittel and Webber, 1973). This complexity tends to create situations in which the objectives of stakeholders and public policies are not aligned and in which individual actions conflict with the needs of other groups. Environmental issues, such as land use, natural resource management, biodiversity and ecosystem conservation, pollution control and management, and recreational or cultural use of natural spaces, tend to generate these complex social challenges (Balint et al, 2011).

However, at the local and state levels, the implementation of such agreements has real and profound repercussions on local communities and can often be a source of socio-political debate and conflict. Different initiatives to address threats to biodiversity and habitat can hinder social and economic agendas by limiting access to available resources and creating restrictions on what can and cannot be done in a specific area. **Similarly, economic agendas to revitalize the local economy through new productive initiatives or tourism can alter cultural heritage and affect sensitive ecosystems. In this context, public policy-making is extremely delicate and prone to generating new conflicts (Fisher, 2022).**
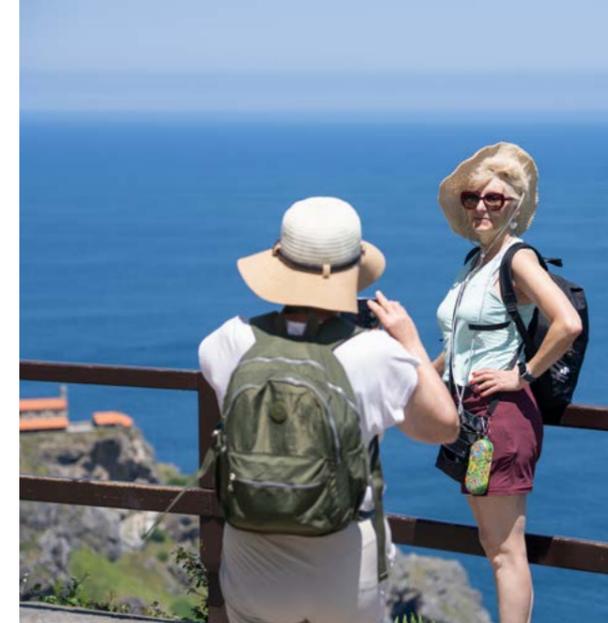
In most environmental problems, stakeholders assign a unique value to a natural resource or physical space based on their own cultural, economic, social, and political history. The environmental issue becomes a symbolic representation of much deeper values, beliefs, and experiences for the individuals and groups that identify with it (Pascual et al., 2023). Managing a contentious environmental issue brings these deeper experiences and value systems to the surface and can activate latent tensions or unexpressed narratives around cultural preservation and social change, political influence, and lack of representation in decision-making, among other issues.

In this way, political decisions around a particular environmental issue can quickly generate social conflict in which stakeholders ask questions such as: "Why is this place, and not another, becoming a priority for policymakers?" "Why are public funds being used to repair the impact of private companies?" or "Why aren't we prioritizing other more urgent issues, such as preserving large ecosystems to mitigate climate change?" Behind each of these positions is a set of beliefs and values that define the different priorities of the stakeholders. At the same time, these beliefs are constructed from the historical, cultural, economic, and environmental knowledge of the different stakeholders (Ozkaynak et al, 2023).

THESE BELIEFS AND VALUES ARE OFTEN EXPRESSED THROUGH COLLECTIVE NARRATIVES, WHICH NOT ONLY EXPLAIN HOW THE CONFLICT IS EXPERIENCED, BUT ALSO WHAT IMAGINARIES OF THE FUTURE ARE CONTESTED AROUND THE TERRITORY
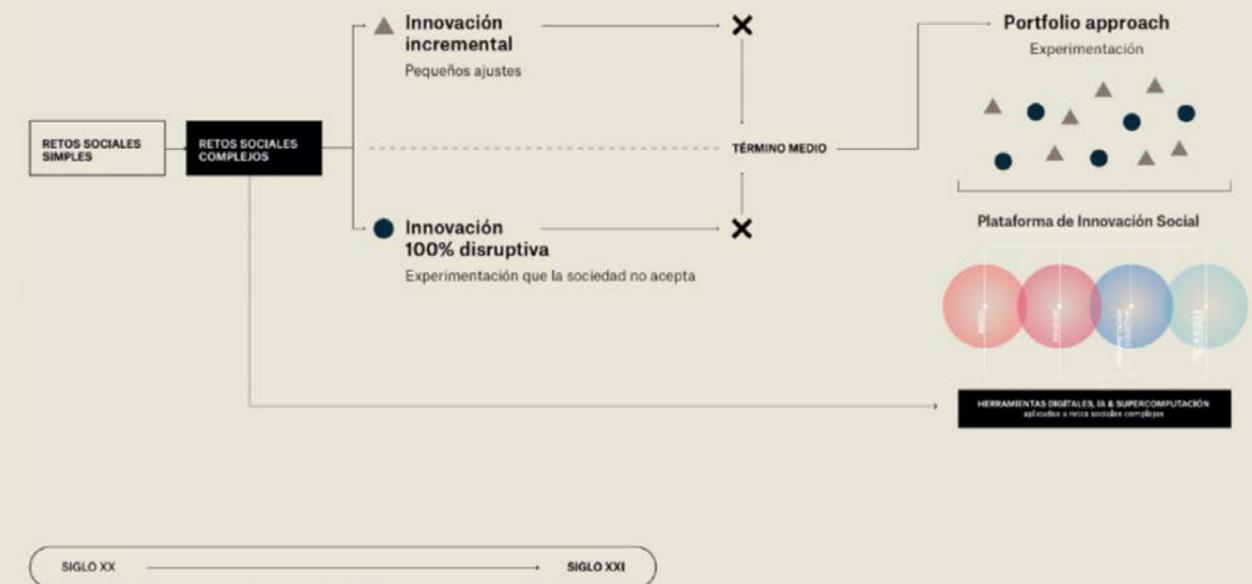

Source ALC

A CONFLICT CAN REMAIN LATENT FOR DECADES, ONLY TO BE REACTIVATED WHEN A STAKEHOLDER FEELS THAT THEIR INTERESTS ARE NOT BEING ADEQUATELY TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS. INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS AND RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN STAKEHOLDERS NEED TO BE RENEGOTIATED AND RECONFIGURED TO ADAPT TO NEW CHANGES AND DYNAMICS, AND THIS PROCESS REQUIRES THE COMMITMENT AND PARTICIPATION OF ALL STAKEHOLDERS

(Fisher, 2022)

The adaptive cycle of Gunderson and Holling, 2002
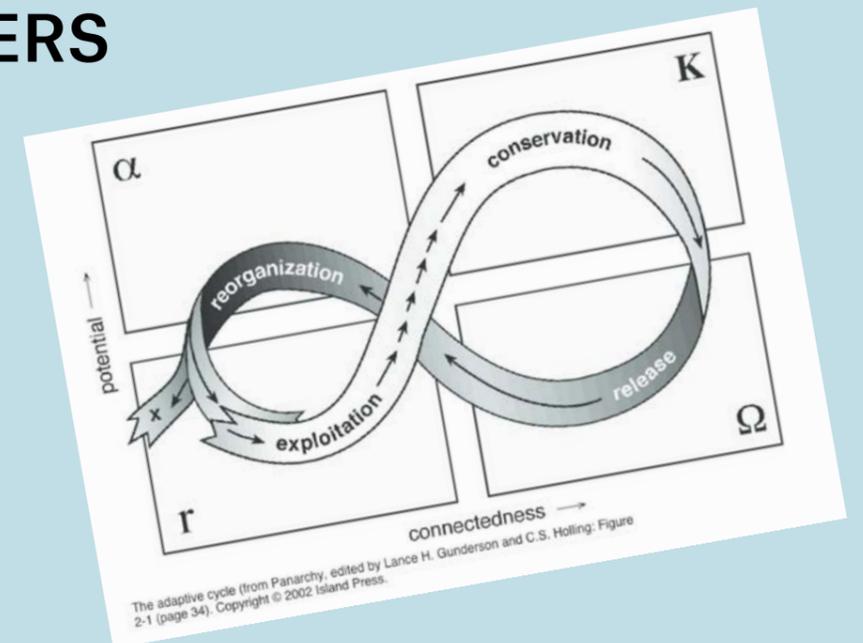
Busturialdea-Urdaibai

Conceptually, socio-ecological transitions are situations in which social relations with the natural environment change, or situations in which the relations of stakeholders with other groups around an environmental issue change. Such transitions have occurred throughout history. However, with increased connectivity between groups, globalization, and the involvement of a wider range of social actors in an issue, and with rapid environmental changes resulting from technological transitions and the impacts of human activity on natural systems, these transitions are becoming more pronounced and their impacts more widely recognized.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT SOCIETIES ARE INCREASINGLY AWARE OF THE INTERCONNECTIONS BETWEEN SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AND THE WAYS IN WHICH SEEMINGLY DISTANT OR DISTINCT ISSUES ARE INTERRELATED. THIS HIGH LEVEL OF INTERCONNECTION MAKES IT DIFFICULT TO SEPARATE ONE PROBLEM FROM OTHER RELATED ISSUES, INCREASING THE SOCIAL COMPLEXITY OF AN ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEM. IN ADDITION, MULTIPLE INTERCONNECTED ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES INCREASE THE SCIENTIFIC COMPLEXITY OF DECISION-MAKING AND PUBLIC POLICY ON ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT. IN SUCH PROBLEMS, TRADITIONAL TOP-DOWN POLICY-MAKING OR UNILATERAL MEASURES GENERATE CONFLICTS BECAUSE THEY DO NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT A SUFFICIENTLY BROAD RANGE OF SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS AND ARE OFTEN BASED ON LIMITED INFORMATION. COMBINING SO MANY DIMENSIONS REQUIRES COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS BETWEEN DIVERSE KNOWLEDGE.

(Fisher, 2014)

Governance approaches to address socio-ecological transitions

Part I. Theoretical framework

Effective governance to address the complexity of the socio-ecological transitions we face requires a different approach from linear planning and hierarchical decision-making. No single institution, expert, company, or stakeholder has all the information and knowledge needed to address a complex issue. They need the information and knowledge of other actors in their ecosystem. Furthermore, social and environmental landscapes are constantly evolving. Addressing them therefore requires collective intelligence.

IT IS USEFUL TO THINK ABOUT THE REGULATORY AND GOVERNANCE CONTEXT OF THESE PROBLEMS FROM AN ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE.

In a natural ecosystem, each type of organism occupies its own niche and performs a unique set of functions that contribute to the overall functioning of the system. In a complex social problem, each stakeholder and institution also occupies its own unique position in the system and has important information about its social, economic, and ecological aspects (Ostrom, 2005; Baird et al., 2018). To effectively understand the problem, it is essential to use the information and knowledge of these diverse stakeholders to generate more efficient policies and management plans (Raymond et al, 2010).

It is essential to understand how the perspectives and needs of stakeholders change and evolve over time, with the aim of incorporating an adaptive approach to governance. There is no single strategy that can be applied in all cases. Rather, collaborative governance processes must be designed and adapted to changing dynamics and implemented within specific timeframes for each problem.

There is a wide range of tools and resources to enrich collaborative governance processes for addressing socio-ecological challenges. Although many of them are useful in general terms and are often informative, they may have limited utility in a specific political context or case if they are not adapted to particular administrative, legal, financial, and political realities. For this reason, it may be useful to consider the types of information needed to inform effective policy-making in socio-ecological transitions. Although there is no definitive list of these information needs, they have been explored by several authors, including Ostrom, 1990; Susskind et al, 1999; Balint et al, 2012.

Much of the existing guidance on managing complex problems includes processes for gathering and analyzing the following types of information:

• **Interested parties and implicated parties:** Understanding the social landscape in terms of who is or considers themselves to be a stakeholder in the issue is critical to ensuring that all relevant groups and perspectives are included and taken into account in the policy-making process and in the implementation of decisions over time. Many groups will have expressed their political positions on an issue, while other interests may be less vocal and may need to be identified through social landscape mapping and iterative analysis of the issues at stake.

• **Social relations and power structures:** In addition to identifying who participates or should participate, it is important to understand the relationships between stakeholder groups in order to understand where coalitions, conflicting interests, and gaps in

participation lie. This mapping can also highlight the different types of power (soft power, such as social capital, and hard power, such as financial and political resources) that influence policy-making.

• **Narratives, metanarratives, and value systems:** To understand stakeholders' agendas and needs, it is important to understand their historical experience, future goals and expectations, as well as the cultural factors that shape their views on an issue. Unlike their stated political positions (narratives), these other factors tend not to be expressed (metanarratives) and require deeper engagement and analysis (identification of value systems).

• **Environmental factors:** In addition to understanding the social nuances of a particular issue, technical factors and environmental considerations must also be taken into account. Much of this research will require the involvement of external specialists and actors.

• **Legal, administrative, and economic constraints:** While the social and environmental characteristics of the problem are complex, so too are the legal and administrative norms and structures that define the policy space. Different agencies and institutions may have specific limitations on the types of policies or measures they can implement.

• **Adaptation:** There is an additional factor that complicates the policy-making and governance process. The social, environmental, and administrative contexts of a problem are constantly changing. Some changes are slow, others rapid, but as the context changes, so do the views of stakeholders. To effectively govern socio-environmental transitions, it is essential to design adaptive policies. In environmental management, this is called adaptive management and involves putting in place processes to gather relevant information and adapt policy implementation over time to ensure that policies remain in tune with changing social and environmental dynamics.

a **Interested parties and implicated parties**

c **Narratives, metanarratives, and value systems**

b **Social relations and power structures**

Environmental factors

d

e **Legal, administrative, and economic constraints**

f **Adaptation**
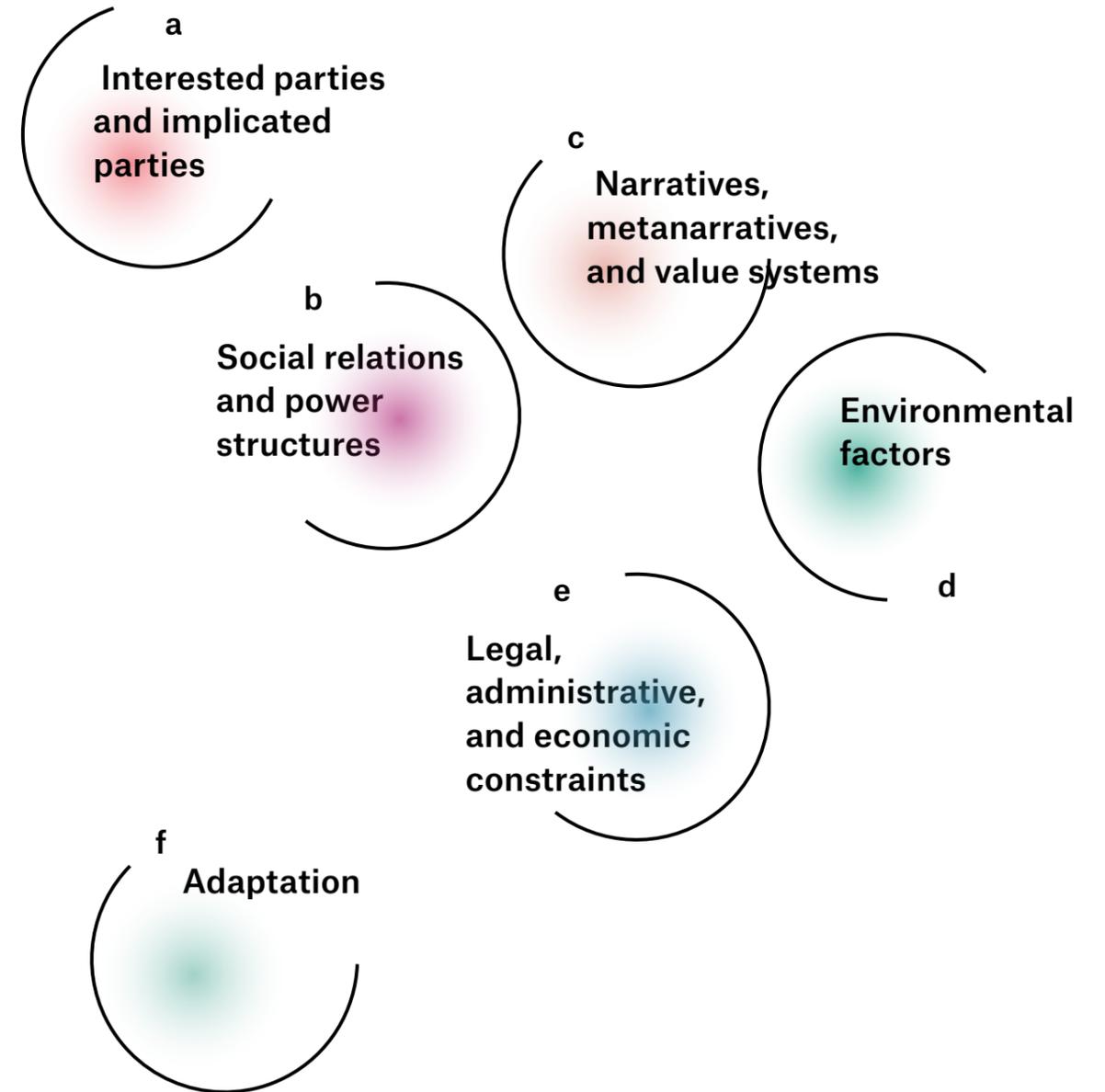
Although the complexity of socio-ecological transitions and the information requirements for effective governance can be overwhelming, there are fundamental principles that guide their implementation. These include: (1) thoroughly understanding the social and environmental complexity of the problem; (2) managing and processing large volumes of technical and stakeholder information; (3) synthesizing this knowledge in a way that is accessible to decision-makers; and (4) continuously monitoring changes in socio-environmental conditions, with the aim of adjusting and adapting policies over time.
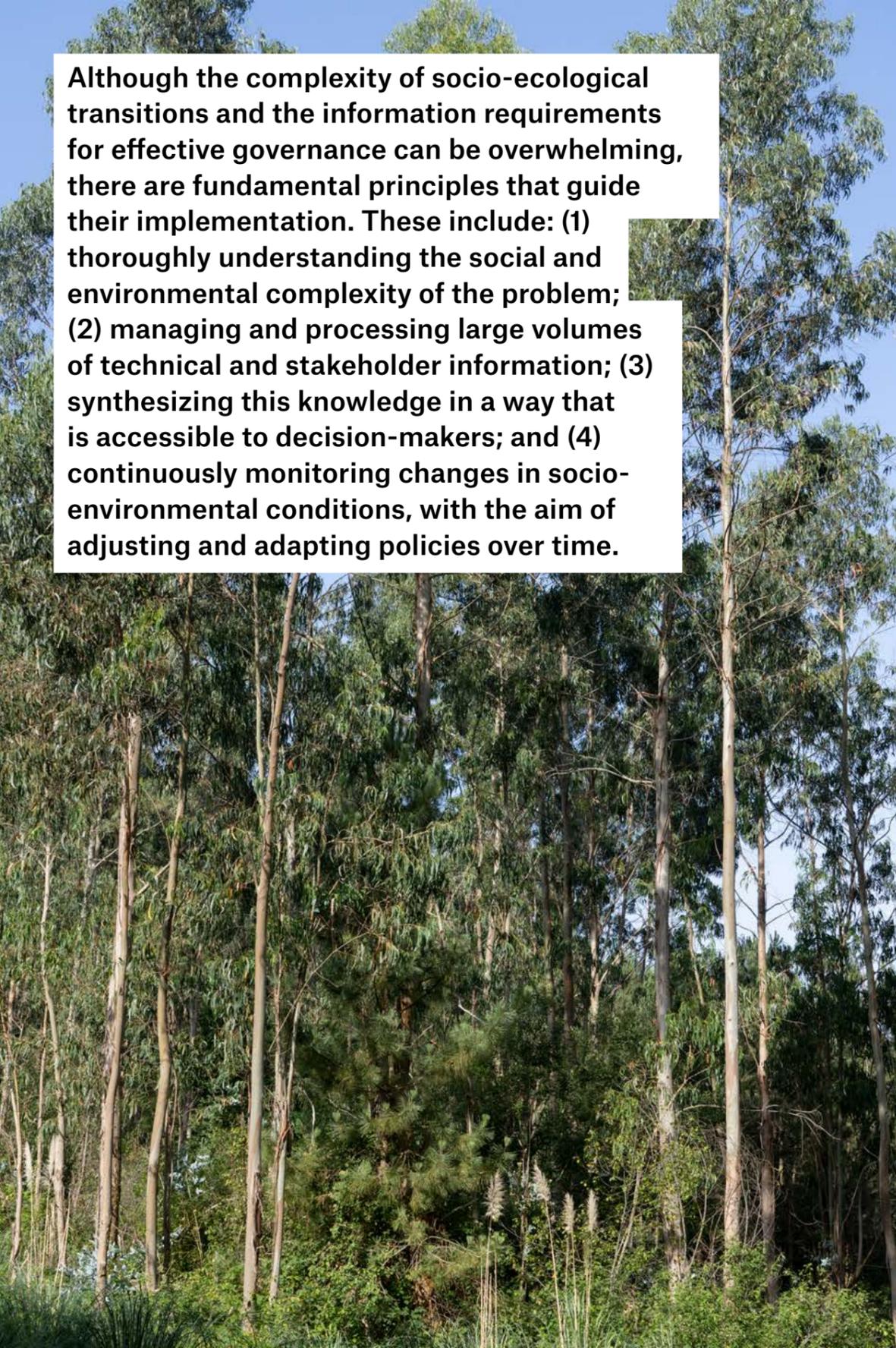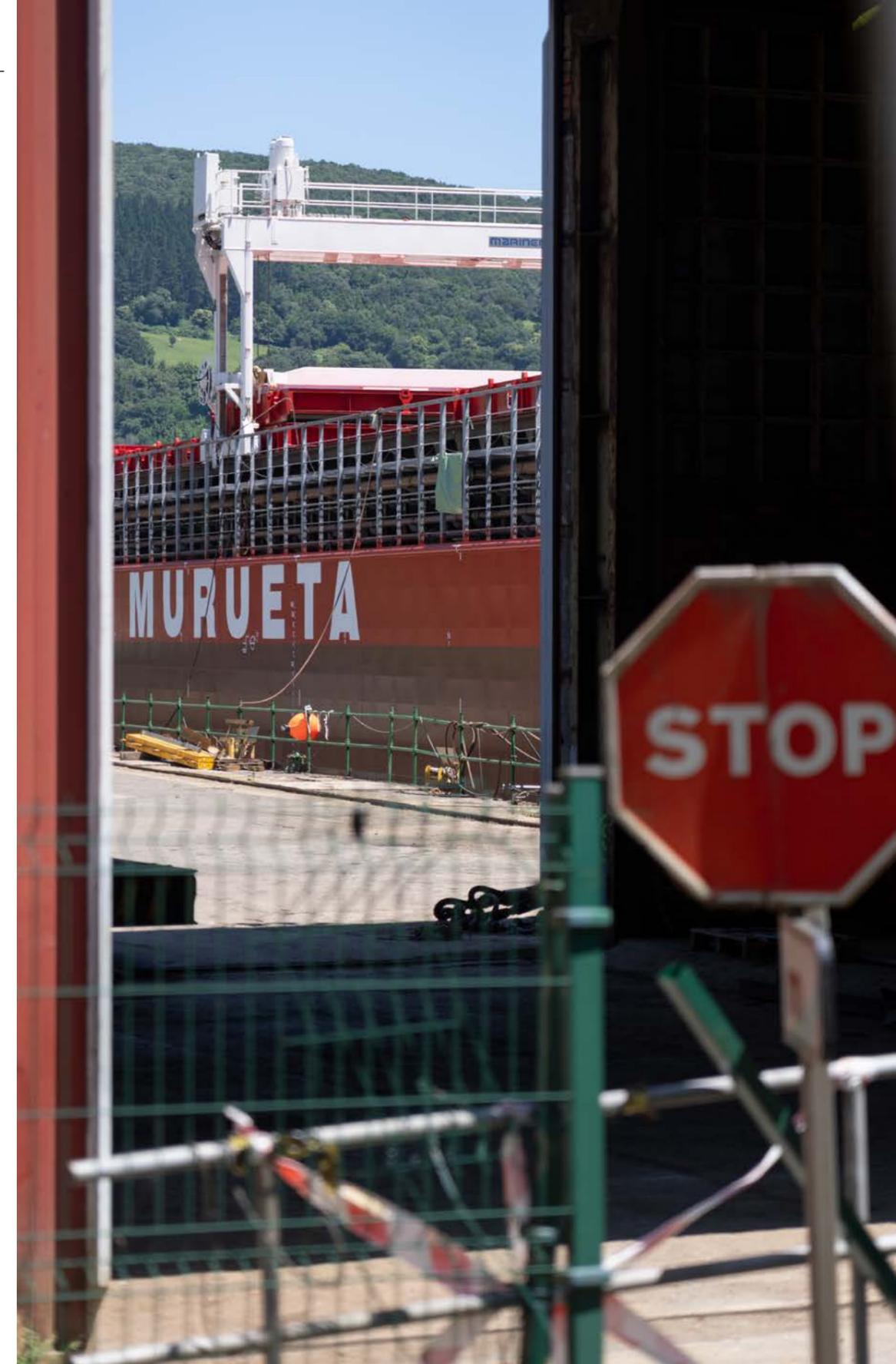
The case of Urdaibai

The proposal to expand the Guggenheim Museum in Urdaibai aims to broaden the museum's offering and contribute to the development of the region. This action involves issues of ecosystem conservation in the biosphere reserve, the cultural and traditional heritage of Urdaibai, the economic and infrastructure development of the region, environmental management, the future of work in the territory, and the inclusion of stakeholders in policy-making. Taken individually, each of these issues could be addressed as an isolated political problem. However, any measure or policy implemented in each of these areas would have profound and significant repercussions on the others, and the effects would be perceived differently by the various stakeholder groups in the region.

The complexity of the Guggenheim Urdaibai issue poses a challenge to properly understanding the range of issues it raises, but it also offers a unique opportunity to better understand the needs, interests, value systems, and aspirations of different sectors of Basque society in the face of new social challenges.

Part II
Approach

THIS SECTION DESCRIBES THE METHODOLOGY USED IN THE LISTENING PROCESS, EMPHASIZING THE IMPORTANCE OF QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS, RELATIONAL MAPPING, AND COLLECTIVE INTERPRETATION OF INFORMATION TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THE CULTURAL, SOCIAL, AND TERRITORIAL DYNAMICS AFFECTING THIS DEBATE

Element	Definition	Strengths	Limitations
Listening	Understanding cultural narratives and deep community perceptions.	Depth, narrative richness.	Less immediate impact, depending on interpretation.
Mapping	Visualize relationships and interactions between key social agents.	Identify gaps, opportunities, and strategic actors.	Constant need for updating.
Collective interpretation	Shared analysis of findings, strengthening consensus and diversity of voices.	Democratization, inclusive validation.	Abstraction requires facilitation.

As we have pointed out, this research is situated within a complex framework, requiring tools that enable a systemic understanding of problems and adaptive intervention connected to cultural and territorial dynamics (Rittel and Webber, 1973). To this end, it is necessary to use techniques that facilitate the capture, analysis, and interpretation of information in constantly changing environments. The analysis must consider how collective identities and social relations influence their configuration, appropriation, and impact. Unlike other methodological approaches that structure research into sequential phases, this listening process proposes a non-linear process of analysis and constant feedback.

This listening process has been structured around three key elements: **(1) mapping actors, (2) collecting narratives, and (3) collective interpretation.** These tools do not operate in isolation, but are articulated in an iterative learning process, in which each phase feeds into the rest and allows the research to be reformulated as the analysis progresses.

The following sections detail each of these three techniques, starting with mapping, which is seen as a key tool for visualizing the innovation ecosystem, identifying interconnections, and analyzing gaps and opportunities within the system.

>Annex 1 explains each of these elements in detail.

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Parte III
Narratives

The listening process began in February 2025 with a mapping of initiatives for the transformation of the region, available in the digital tool, which has made it possible to identify the key agents who should be listened to. Although for the moment the mapping has only served to identify key agents and ensure that we collect their narratives, in future phases of the project we will be able to cross-reference this with perceptions to check whether perceptions are being addressed with specific initiatives and what nature these initiatives are. This exercise will also make it possible to identify future actions to respond to legitimate perceptions that are not being adequately addressed.

The people participating in the process have been identified through snowball sampling, one of the most popular techniques in qualitative research. This methodology allows the voices of people outside formal networks, often the most difficult to identify, to be included. It begins with a small initial group, which recommends other participants, and continues until opinions are repeated and no new nuances emerge.

So far, more than 500 individual narratives have been collected, with a target of 1,000 by the end of 2025. Most of the narratives have been collected through semi-structured interviews, with open-ended questions that allow people to speak freely about the issues they consider most important. The conversations have revolved around questions such as:

- **What is happening in the region?**

- **What are the main challenges?**

- **What opportunities exist?**

- **In this context, what do you think about the possible expansion of the Guggenheim Museum in Urdaibai?**

- **Who would gain or lose from all this?**

- **What else would you like to add?**

This open structure was designed to create a space for conversation that encourages the emergence of spontaneous, localized narratives, without imposing predefined categories.

The vast majority of the conversations have been recorded, transcribed, and anonymized. The first 250 examples are now available on the digital tool, although they do not yet reflect the full diversity of opinions gathered. The digital tool also allows users to see what initiatives are underway to address these issues and assess whether they are truly responding to the perceptions gathered in the process.

The narratives collected through snowball sampling have been analyzed in the first contrast spaces, through ethnographic profiles, to ensure that all voices are represented and that networks have not influenced the content. These profiles are not constructed from demographic variables, but from shared patterns of meaning that emerge from the cross-analysis of the narratives. In addition, this analysis is complemented by thematic and relational coding in Ktool, which allows us to observe how different perceptions are connected, what contradictions emerge, and what elements are repeated, change, or are reinforced over time.

>Annex 1 explains each of these elements in detail
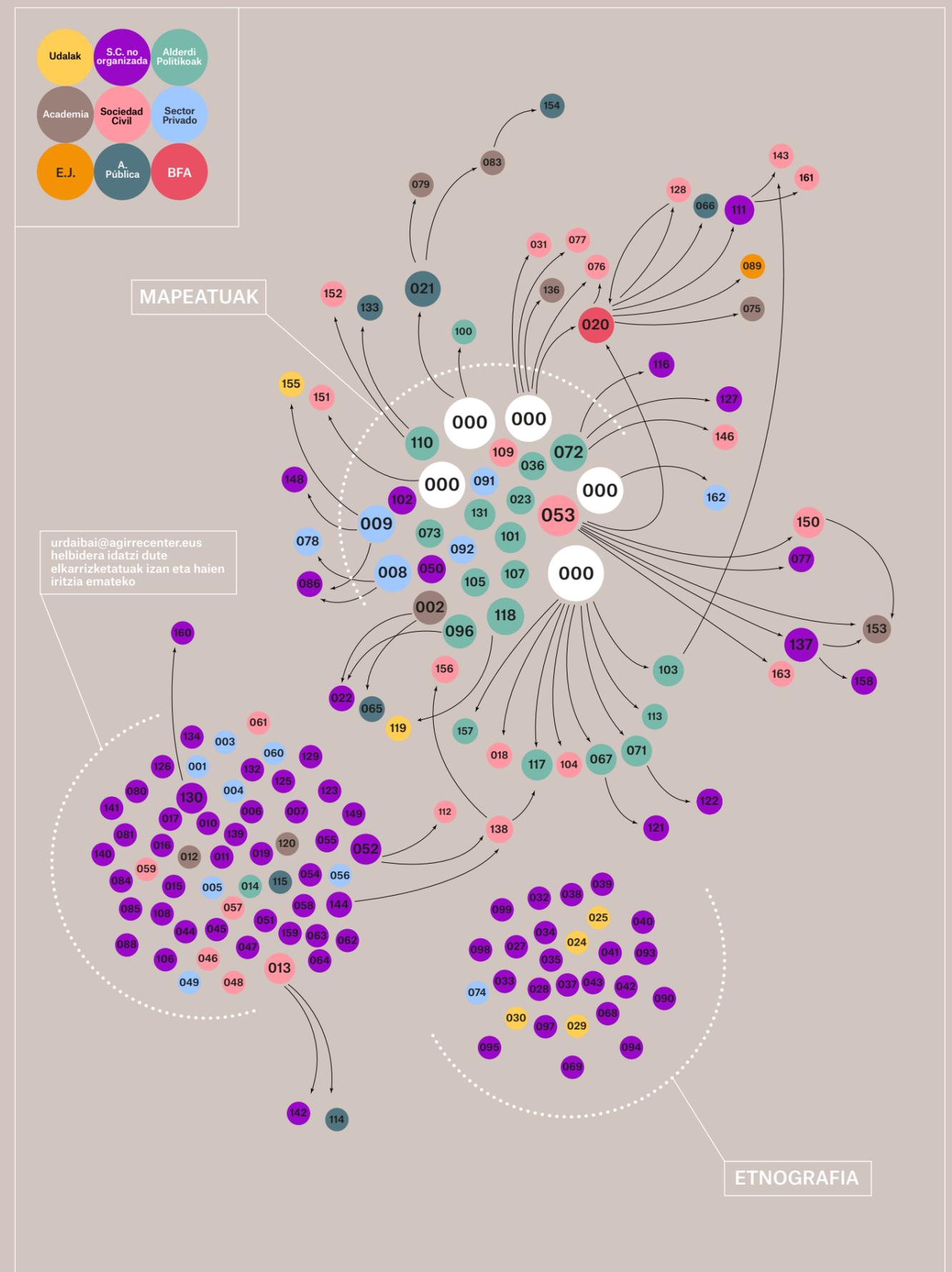
These sessions have been held in recent weeks in different municipalities in the Busturialdea-Urdaibai region: Ibarrangelu (June 11), Murueta (June 18), Bermeo (June 25), Gernika (July 2), and Elantxobe (July 7). They were attended by people who had already expressed their opinions, others who had not yet participated, key players in the region, and Basque institutions.

Five distinct narrative perception patterns have emerged from the listening process, reflecting different positions on the initiative and, more broadly, on the future of the region. Far from being homogeneous or closed, these perception patterns bring together diverse voices—in terms of age, gender, ideology, and profession—that share similar arguments, concerns, and priorities. These five perception patterns not only reveal positions on the museum, but also diverse ways of understanding development, governance, participation, and identity in Urdaibai. It is important to note that these are not definitive perception patterns. This report is preliminary, and in the coming months, the listening process will delve deeper into all of these perception patterns.

In the same interview, a person may take different positions depending on the topic being addressed. At certain times, they may be closer to profile 1 and at others to profile 2, depending on their experience, priorities, or the specific context they are talking about.

This shows that narratives are not fixed or mutually exclusive blocks, but complex and changing frameworks. For this reason, some quotes may appear associated with more than one narrative perception pattern. This overlap is not an inconsistency, but rather a manifestation of the richness and depth of the listening process.

On the other hand, although the sample we are working on is already significant, it is very important to remember that these preliminary results do not indicate prevalence, nor do they reflect the actual outcome of a hypothetical consultation.

Main Narratives

Parte III.
Narratives

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001

"It is regrettable that a private museum project is being promoted and that public institutions are not providing information to citizens about projects that are being funded with public money" (0150).

"I am totally against the expansion of the Guggenheim Museum in Urdaibai".

This first perception pattern represents the most vocal opposition to the possible expansion of the museum in the region. Its main objective is to prevent this project from going ahead and it believes that the discussion should focus on this issue, regardless of other relevant issues related to the development of the region. Although we have assigned a fictitious age and profession to this collective interpretation, different generations, genders, occupations, and even ideologies and political positions converge within this same perception pattern. Their arguments are compelling: the possible location of the museum in the Murueta wetland does not comply with current legislation, there is insufficient information about the project, and decisions have been made against the will of the citizens.

001

Alongside this main concern, the tourism development model is being questioned. In Urdaibai, as in other coastal areas of the Basque Country, there is a perception of excessive tourism during the summer months. This narrative perception pattern is based on experiences with the management of San Juan de Gaztelugatxe. The quotes that support this narrative tell us about a public heritage site that is no longer available to local residents and has been "commercialized." This same case is directly associated with rising housing prices, the saturation of the transportation network, and the replacement of a productive economy with low-quality services. In his opinion, the experience in San Juan de Gaztelugatxe demonstrates the potential negative impact that the museum would have in Urdaibai: "We have the precedent of San Juan de Gaztelugatxe. San Juan de Gaztelugatxe, with the Game of Thrones theme, has made us a little fearful and tourist-phobic, and that is still present (0157). "We always make the same mistake like novices, and if you look at places where there is a lot of tourism, the ecological footprint they leave behind, who benefits from it, and how it affects the lives of the people who live there, the quality of life drops dramatically" (0234). They also warn of the impact of this type of action on the daily life of small municipalities.

The verbatim transcription of the opinions gathered shows a vehement and angry style, but this should not be confused with a lack of depth or nuance. **This narrative perception pattern is shared by many environmental activists and experts who emphasize the collective impact of a possible location for the museum in the area, but also by residents who are concerned about their quality of life and leisure activities.**

Tourism

This perception pattern considers it a big mistake to focus exclusively on tourism development in the area as a means of socio-economic development, as it generates precarious, temporary jobs with low wages in a region where higher-quality employment linked to fishing and industry has historically predominated.

Housing

The housing crisis is very present in this narrative perception pattern: "You can see the overcrowding. Lots of people, increasingly difficult living conditions… For me, one museum is enough, Urdaibai is a museum, we don't need another one." (0017)

Identity

In this environmental and social context, it is difficult to understand what is considered a huge investment of public money in a tourist attraction that is not linked to the region and its identity: "Public funds are going to be used exclusively to promote a private company, because the Guggenheim Foundation is a 100% private company" (0192).

Ecology

This narrative perception pattern constructs its argument as a tool for environmental conservation in the region. The expansion of the Guggenheim museum in the region would endanger the ecological wealth of the territory.

Governance

They feel particularly aggrieved by the steps they believe have been taken by the institutions to move the project forward, including the clean-up of contaminated land, as this cannot be seen as blackmail and they believe it should have been done independently of the museum expansion project. In this regard, they denounce the lack of transparency and institutional communication regarding the project. They consider that sufficient and accurate information has not been provided.

Looking to the future, they are extremely concerned about the top-down model of governance that they feel has been imposed. "We cannot allow old problems to be solved by creating new ones."

Finally, this narrative perception pattern considers that the designation as a Biosphere Reserve in 1984 contained the spirit of becoming a laboratory to experiment with everything that could be done in an environmentally protected environment, to learn to be pioneers in green economy and technologies, and to be international leaders in green R&D. It considers that protection and economic development must be compatible, but "there is an ecological limit, a red line, which development cannot cross."

Looking to the future, they see untapped opportunities in the primary sector, which represents the historical identity of the region: "gu gara itsasoa eta lurra" (people, mountains, and land). They believe that Urdaibai must be a pioneer in reviving this declining primary sector, creating a pole or food hub with spaces for consumption, warehouses, training, product sales, cooking, and services for local schools and residences. This would help alleviate the "exodus" that occurs every morning from the region to Bilbao or Amorebieta to work outside the region.

In short, this perception pattern is not opposed out of inertia. They are convinced that this is a crucial moment for the future of the region. They want an Urdaibai with a future, where the sea and the land continue to be the real livelihood, and where there is a commitment to green innovation instead of repeating outdated tourist models.

*"There is no commitment
to development plans for
the region. Urdaibai has
become stagnant and is in
the process of total economic
decline." (0138)*

"I am against the expansion, but I want to talk about the development of the region".

This second perception pattern also opposes the expansion of the museum, but considers that the discussion should focus on the development of the region. It is a question of priority or urgency. This perception pattern is also shared by different ideologies, genders, and generations. The narratives collected in this perception pattern consider that Urdaibai is stagnant and in decline. Despite being aware of the proposals being promoted by the institutions within the framework of the new Strategic Plan for the region and the declaration of a priority action zone (ZAP), they consider that the economic investment is insufficient and that the discussion has been superficial and limited to the least critical agents.

They fear that the result of this process could be a commitment to "all-out" tourism (0072), "You can't put all your eggs in one basket" (0036). Like the first perception pattern, they believe that public investment in the region should be channeled into other things that have been waiting for decades. "Renewal or a new impetus, in my opinion, should come from public investment, but there are other options." (0195)

The area needs a strategic plan for the region's economy, and it cannot be just the Guggenheim, because the strategy for the area is more industrial than tourist-oriented, which is already under a lot of pressure (0040).

Although they are against the Guggenheim expansion project in Urdaibai, they call for more investment and new infrastructure. In his opinion, initiatives for the economic development of the region are disconnected and do not emphasize the need to promote a new industrial model, training, research, and new technologies linked to decarbonization: "Ez dot uste Guggenheim museoa txanpinoi modura txertatuta baliogarria izango denik, ez badago kokatuta beste garapen proiektu baten barruan" (0032).

He is not against tourism projects per se, but believes that the priority should be to protect the biosphere and build sustainable economic development linked to the territory. Above all, they believe that the discussion should focus on how to manage the economic investment of the regional strategic plan.

Finally, they are concerned that the only conversation is about the museum, while the structural problems of employment, industry, and housing are not being addressed. They feel that young people and migrants are not being heard. They believe that we must think from Busturialdea and for Busturialdea.

002 —● Arguments

Social commitment

The problem is not only economic; they are greatly concerned about social development. This perception pattern draws attention to the precariousness of the care system in the area and calls for a different approach to the way migrants in precarious jobs are treated.

Location

This narrative perception pattern opposes the location of the museum in Murueta but considers that other larger municipalities could host cultural infrastructure that would showcase Basque heritage.

Museum project

In relation to the proposal presented on the Guggenheim Bilbao Museum website for Urdaibai, there are calls to learn more about the museum project, not just the physical infrastructure. In their opinion, only the container is being discussed, but not the content.

Governance

Opinions criticize an outdated model of governance, where decisions are made from the top down, without any process of consultation or participation: "What we want is for the inhabitants of the region to be asked what can be done here, but before threatening to build a museum 'yes or yes'" (0169). They believe that time and opportunities have been lost due to a lack of forward planning and political will.

Primary sector

They see clear opportunities if there is a commitment to diversification: promoting the primary sector, creating an agri-food hub, attracting green R&D, and creating quality jobs: "With the biosphere reserve, we can leverage the economy and technology, create an R&D hub, and become a benchmark" (0103).

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003 —● "I'm in favor, we have to do something".

Animaliek bai, baina gu be bai, the two-legged animals that we are. Ze bestela, azkenean guk amaituko dugu erreserba indiar batean, ipiniko gaitue han eta hala, hasi berbetan euskeraz! - (0144).

This perception pattern represents those who support the possible expansion of the museum. Their main argument is that we must take the initiative in the face of decline. In their opinion, institutions have the responsibility and democratic legitimacy to propose disruptive initiatives that drive change, and although they are aware that criticism may arise, they argue that new ideas are always questioned... until they work. They believe that we usually criticize institutions for not doing enough, and when they do, they are questioned. They compare this to what happened with the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao: initial rejection, followed by widespread support after seeing its positive impact.

003

This perception pattern reflects the narratives of people of different generations, genders, and ideologies (it is not a narrative perception pattern associated exclusively with a political party) who are in favor of the museum expansion project, but also many people who are currently unemployed (or in precarious employment) and groups working in hospitality, services, and tourism. It is particularly prevalent in the smaller towns in the interior of the region and on the right bank of the estuary.

"I like the idea initially, because in the end it's similar to what was done in Bilbao in its day. Of course, as long as it's done with respect for the environment and regulated" (0101).

Their motivations are not uniform either. In some cases, it is a clear and direct yes to the project. In others, support is more linked to the idea that "something big needs to be done" because the situation in the region is unsustainable, and in that context, the museum is welcome. There is a shared sense of urgency: we cannot go on like this.

003

Arguments

Emergency

They believe that the situation in Urdaibai is unsustainable, and that either something is done or the region will die: Nik bakarrik esan gura dutena da proiektu hori aurrera ez badoa, zeozer egin behar dala (0106). This narrative perception pattern speaks of lifeless villages, with closed bars and no shops, and feels that young people cannot stay because of the lack of housing and employment. In their opinion, there is a lack of health and transport services, there are water problems... In some cases, they speak from a place of nostalgia, "what we were and are no longer," and list the companies that have closed in recent years. They also feel that local identity is being lost, that Urdaibai is becoming a beautiful but empty backdrop. The idea that sums up their argument is that it is not worth standing still.

Positive experiences

This perception pattern repeatedly mentions the Bird Center as a success story. In their opinion, this project has involved physical work on the marshland and no one has complained. The project attracts thousands of people every year and is not considered to have had a negative impact on the environment.

Seasonal variation

In other cases, perhaps more linked to employment in tourism and hospitality, the lack of tourism in winter is cited, and it is believed that the project could lead to a reduction in seasonal variation in tourism in the area: "Tourism is a reality in our region today, but we need to build on that reality to create opportunities for development" (0030). They would like it to be more than just a museum, but a multi-layered project involving culture, employment, nature, and other elements. Although they are in favor of the project, they acknowledge that they do not have all the information and would like to know more before making a clear decision. They believe it is a matter of seeing it as an opportunity to avoid stagnation.

Differences in the region

This narrative perception pattern draws attention to the different realities experienced by larger and smaller municipalities, especially those inland on the right bank of the estuary. They believe that many of the voices opposed to the expansion of the project do so from a position of privilege and without knowing the reality of depopulation and lack of services in smaller municipalities. The primary sector is mentioned as a possibility for the future, but no one wants their children to go into fishing or agriculture.

Ecology

They consider themselves an environmentalist, but do not believe that protecting the territory means doing nothing. They think the region needs movement, activity, and projects that provide real jobs. "Let it not be just a museum."

004

Fourth narrative perception pattern

One of the mistakes has been the lack of information with clear evidence. As they say, "data kills the story." If the data justifies the project, much of the resistance deflates. But without data, doubts persist. (0133)

"It depends on how it's done, I don't have enough information".

This fourth perception pattern does not have a clearly defined position and represents people who, depending on how the initiative develops, would be in favor of or against the expansion of the museum. They share with the previous perception patterns the criticism of the lack of information and for that reason consider that they cannot take a clear position.

004

Fourth narrative perception pattern

The narratives collected in this perception pattern do not rule out the idea of a Guggenheim in Urdaibai in absolute terms, but believe that clear data and a serious plan for the region are lacking. They consider that if there were evidence that it would really generate quality employment and would not damage the environment, much of the resistance would be mitigated: "Like any other project. Its processing must guarantee the criteria of the Reserve. The Biosphere Reserve involves combining social development with environmental protection." (0312). They want to believe that this will be the case, but without clear data or guarantees, mistrust persists. They believe that life in the region is very good, criticizes certain behaviors of "microlocalism," in which many people in the region consider working in Bilbao as a sign of low quality of life, and downplays the narrative of the exodus to Bilbao for work: "the world doesn't fall apart because people work outside the region." (0392).

In general terms, they see no problem with building a museum if it is done well, and they trust that the Guggenheim Foundation will not associate its brand with a project that has a negative impact on the environment. In this regard, they believe that the location is very important: "There are areas in Gernika without having to take the Urdaibai estuary. The problem is that they want to put it there, in that spot, with all the wonders we have there. I'm not against it being done, but not there" (0264).

Arguments

Information

For this perception pattern, the main problem in this process is the lack of information and strategic vision. They believe that when it comes to taking a position, data is needed on how many people will come and how it will be managed. At the same time, they feel that there is no development model for Urdaibai beyond tourism and that the economic, industrial, and service potential of the area is not being exploited.

Basque culture

This narrative perception pattern also considers local roots. If a museum is built, they believe that it would not make sense to replicate the Guggenheim in Bilbao, but rather that it should be built in connection with avant-garde Basque culture.

Employment

They also believe that the region is ready to rethink its future based on the needs shared by the vast majority of its inhabitants: "There is a region that is ready to take charge of its own destiny, that's for sure. And I think that those who are in favor, whether they agree or disagree, want to achieve quality jobs for the future. That's what they want, whether it's easy or difficult, but they all want it one way or another." (0344)

Participation

Although they criticize the lack of transparency in the process, they do not feel particularly called upon to participate, mainly because they distrusts institutions.

Location

They would like to explore other options, both in terms of location and the format of the buildings. Within this perception pattern, we have found suggestions for smaller, modular buildings that rotate between different locations, with ephemeral architecture, and which, in addition to not polluting, could have a regenerative effect on the environment. As with the first perception pattern described, there is concern that cleaning contaminated soil will be interpreted as blackmail to build the museum, rather than an obligation of the institutions regardless of any other considerations: "In order to contribute, we will erode the land and decontaminate all the contamination on the land" (0200)

Along with this institutional disaffection, voices have also emerged during the process which, although they have not wanted to participate directly in interviews or collective interpretation spaces, express a clear opinion when questioned informally or indirectly. The perception patterns that will evolve until the end of the year will reflect a complete mosaic of the narratives existing in the territory.

"My opinion isn't going to change things".

"In the end, we've been in crisis for a long time, this has been done many times, nothing has ever come of it, and we're a bit fed up, tired. You say... another one, what for?" (0132).

This fifth perception pattern mainly represents people who express helplessness, disaffection, and skepticism about participatory and institutional processes. They believe that their voice does not count enough to change the course of decisions. They often assume that institutions have already made the decision, and therefore, participating is pointless. Some people who fit this perception pattern are participating in the listening process, but they do so with skepticism.

Like the previous perception pattern, it is contradictory in that it can represent people who could potentially be in favor but prefer not to take a public stance, as well as people who are against the museum expansion and, at the end of the day, do not trust that the listening process will be taken into account. Likewise, the collective interpretation sessions have suggested that it includes people who could take a position but do not do so for fear of the social or personal consequences of expressing an opinion they perceive as minority or uncomfortable.

This perception pattern is characterized by its complexity and ambivalence, and further qualitative listening will be necessary to better understand the nuances of each voice. As in all social debates that generate conflicting opinions, the narratives that share this profile consider that there may be some difficulty and even a phenomenon of "spiral of silence" when it comes to expressing public opinions on this issue and that the listening process must make a special effort to identify these possible narratives and hidden voices.

Spiral of silence
Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann
1979

The spiral of silence is a communication theory that describes how people tend to remain silent about their opinions when they believe they are different from the majority opinion, for fear of isolation or social rejection. This phenomenon can lead to a distorted perception of public opinion, where a minority opinion appears stronger and more widespread than it actually is.
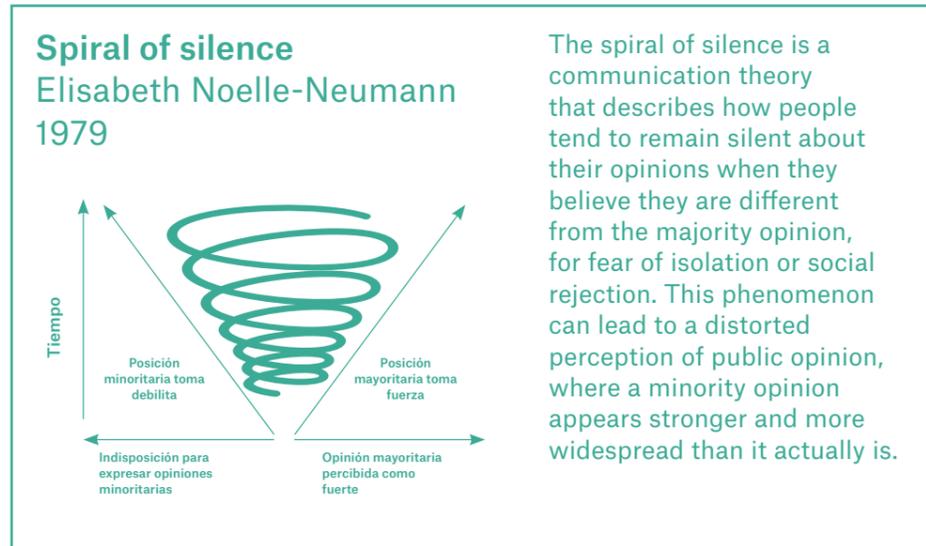
Arguments

Disconnection

According to the narratives collected, people who feel that their voice does not count for institutions use a wide variety of arguments. In some cases, these arguments are critical of the disconnect between institutions and society, but in other cases they attribute it to a lack of information or knowledge on the subject: "Herritarrok jakin behar doguz gauzak, baina batzutan herritar guztiok ez dekogu ahalmena eta ezagutza gauzak erabakitzeko" (0187).

Mistrust

This perception pattern is highly critical of the management of the initiative and believes that there may be hidden interests that society is unaware of. Specific mention is made of possible interests linked to real estate speculation in the Murueta area, and recent legislative changes in coastal regulations are cited as clear evidence that the rules can be broken if necessary. Distrust is one of the main themes of this perception pattern. "What we are talking about may already have been decided and I am participating, but if it is something that has already been imposed…" (0041)

Other urgent issues

This perception pattern also shows that there are other urgent issues that should be addressed before the museum. These include housing, transportation, and health services. Housing is seen as the most urgent and real problem: rents are impossible, and buying a home is out of reach for young people: "Housing is the most serious problem at the moment. It is impossible to find housing, there are too many people on welfare. We have a rent of 700 euros, depending on where and what, and it is impossible to pay. Young people have to get financial assistance to pay the rent. Living with elderly relatives is a luxury…" (0037).

This respondent considers that everything has become a luxury, even renting a modest apartment, and links this to the model of tourism that has been imposed in recent years. His arguments reinforce the idea that institutional priorities are out of step with the real needs of the population.

"The difficulty and arduousness of housing problems should not be underestimated, and we have a real problem here. For us, our children and grandchildren are here, and we have no desire to move to another region or town. And I do not believe that serious public policy can respond to these problems in a serious and coherent manner." (0361)

Parte IV
Initial
conclusions

Busturialdea-Urdaibai

1. Plurality

The first conclusion of this first phase of the listening process is that participation is very plural and active. We have already collected more than 500 narratives and identified another 400 people through the snowball process who will be interviewed in the coming months. Most of these narratives can be read in full on the digital platform set up for this process, anonymously and with the express permission of the participants. We sincerely appreciate the trust these people have placed in the work of the Agirre Lehendakaria Center and deeply respect those who did not wish to participate. Our goal is to try to understand in depth the opinions of both sides and to ensure that their perspectives are reflected in this report.

2. Methodological bias

The listening process has so far identified five main narratives. Although the sample we are working on is already significant, it is very important to remember that these preliminary results **do not mean prevalence**. The snowball process allows the opinions of the most interested and active people to be collected in the first phase, which may distort the final result. Over the coming months, we will see whether these perception patterns are confirmed or whether we need to introduce nuances and corrections. In our opinion, we still need to gather more opinions from **migrants, better understand the perspectives of younger and older people, and** of the main cultural actors in the territory.

3. Collaborative governance

The five narratives identified agree that there has not been enough information about the project and that the way in which this type of initiative is approached needs to be rethought. Both those in favor and those against, and especially those who do not express a definite opinion, consider that they do not have the necessary information and ask the Basque institutions to share it in real time. They believe that transparency could dispel doubts about the different steps that are already being taken.

This demand is accompanied by a **deeper reflection** on how large-scale strategic projects should be approached. Specifically, there is a need to incorporate a "collaborative governance" approach in which institutions engage in dialogue with social partners, businesses, and knowledge centers throughout the process, not just at the beginning or end. In the same way that new forums for collaborative governance have been opened to discuss the transformation of the Basque healthcare system, the energy model, and security policies, this type of strategic initiative should follow a similar model of action.

4. Need for further analysis

The "it depends" narrative and the "my opinion doesn't count" narrative may be linked to opinions in favor of or against expansion. The listening process should delve deeper into these issues to unravel these profiles. As in all social debates that generate conflicting opinions, the narratives collected suggest that there may be some difficulty in expressing public opinions on this issue and that the listening process should make a special effort to identify these possible hidden narratives.

5. Sustainable Human Development

Despite the differences and nuances, all narratives are built on a commitment to Sustainable Human Development. People who have been working for decades to promote the biosphere reserve believe that there has been a very positive evolution in the region. **Previously, the declaration of a biosphere reserve was seen as a possible brake on economic development, and this narrative has evolved positively.**

Today, there are opinions for and against the expansion of the museum, but above the different narratives there are common perception patterns and the arguments used to construct these narratives are similar: (1) it is necessary to combine special protection of the environment (due to its nature as a nature reserve) with the socio-economic development of the area, (2) we must commit to a model of tourism that takes into account the negative impacts it generates, especially on the quality of employment, the direct impact on rising housing prices, and the saturation of transportation systems. There is broad consensus on this issue and, to date, it is noteworthy that we have not encountered any narratives that deny climate change or that position themselves outside the framework of values associated with sustainable human development.

6. The development model

Most of the perception patterns identified share the view that the **underlying debate** is related to the region's development model. So far, the listening process and the work related to the strategic plan for the region's development have run in parallel, but in the future they could be interconnected.

These voices are calling for a new model of tourism and concrete solutions to the housing and transportation problems generated by the current model. All narratives agree that over the last 10 years, the way Basque society understands the value of tourism has changed, not only in Urdaibai. A decade ago, attracting visitors to a developing region was seen as a positive thing, but today there is a much more critical view of the real impact it has. What was once synonymous with prosperity now raises doubts and resistance because of its direct impact on housing, mobility, services, and social cohesion.

7. Location as a symbolic element

The possible location of the museum is a central issue. The listening process has shown that there is no outright opposition to the possibility of developing new cultural infrastructure. However, the location in Murueta is rejected across the board by different groups and has become a symbolic point of friction, loaded with environmental, historical, and emotional values for the community. **Rethinking the location, size, and nature of the possible sites for the museum would allow the debate to be restarted.**

Murueta as an affective atmosphere

Escalera de participación de Sherry Arnstein, 1969

Murueta is not just a physical place: it is a symbolic space charged with collective meanings. According to Ben Anderson (2009), spaces generate affective atmospheres: shared forms of affection that transcend the individual but are felt intimately, shaping perceptions and actions. The 945 hectares of the wetland combine territorial pride, historical memory, a sense of grievance over institutional neglect, and narratives of wetland protection. It is not just a natural environment, it is now also a symbol of identity and politics. Intervention in a space like this requires understanding its three dimensions: material (wetland and contaminated land), discursive (narratives of protected reserve or imposition), and affective-symbolic (atmospheres of mistrust or resistance). These dimensions create a collective environment that prevents constructive debate if their complexity is not recognized.

Furthermore, if we analyze participation using Arnstein's "Ladder" (1969), we see that the community currently perceives its involvement as low (information, consultation), which is interpreted as tokenism: a facade of participation that appears to include them but does not give them real decision-making power. In other words, they are informed or consulted, but the important decisions have already been made, and their voice does not transform the results. True transformation requires scaling up to models of association or even citizen power, where decision-making power is not only shared, but also exercised in a genuine exercise of collaborative governance. **In short, Murueta is a place steeped in emotional atmosphere and collective symbolism. Approaching it solely as a technical or tourist site ignores its material, discursive, and emotional density.**

8. Added value

The most specialized narratives in the cultural industries demand greater clarity and definition of the art and museum offer. They consider that the building project has been presented, but little has been said about the potential added value and relevance of a new art infrastructure of this kind. Those interviewed so far show a need for the local community to **identify with the project** and to link it to the Basque identity. In the opinion of these sectors, specialization in art and nature should not be at odds with a **greater presence of avant-garde Basque contemporary art.**

9. Contra-dictions

Naturally, all narratives contain contradictions. We demand environmental commitments that we do not apply in our daily lives. We criticize the tourism model but then benefit from it as much as we can, in our own environment or when we visit other places. This listening process allows us to visualize these contradictions and accept them naturally, with the aim of enabling public discussion to help us accept the truth that exists in the opinions of others and be more self-critical of our own positions.

10. Responding from a political perspective

This process is not binding, but it is helping to identify questions and suggestions that are both legitimate and reasonable. It will be up to the institutions to assess them and communicate their impressions and possible future actions. The deep listening approach does not replace decision-making, but it provides a basis for designing public policies that are sustainable over time because they make a special effort to understand the frameworks of meaning of citizens. At a deeper level, this debate allows us to talk about what model of development we want for the region (and for the whole of Euskal Herria) and how collaborative governance processes with a strong community perspective should be activated.

Parte V
Next steps
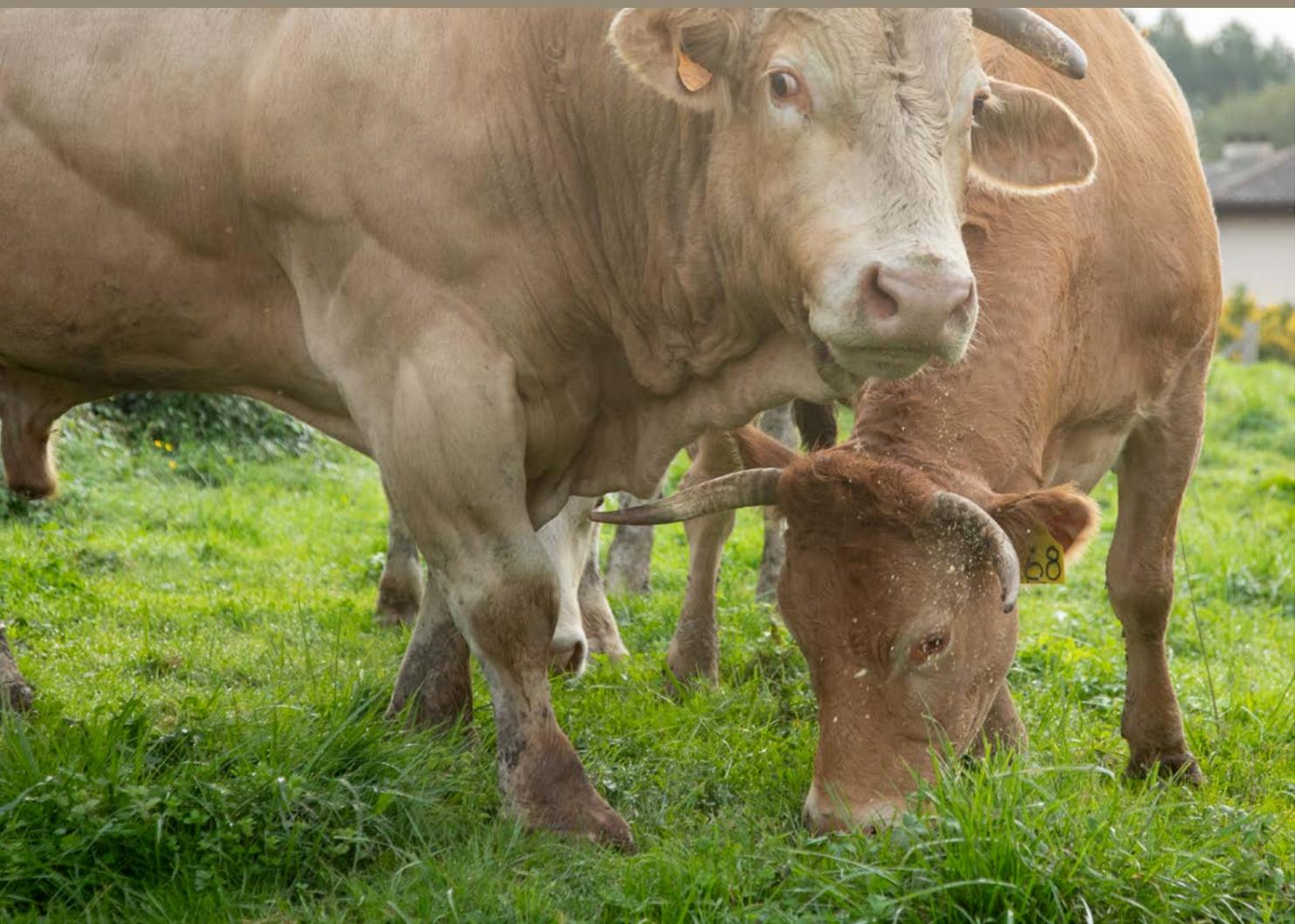
1. **We will continue with the listening process.** In the coming months, we will continue to collect testimonies to incorporate voices that are not yet sufficiently represented, such as young people, older people, migrants, fishermen, and hospitality professionals, among other groups. In total, we will collect 1,000 individual narratives.

2. **Refining profiles and perception patterns in the research.** The listening phase is understood as an ongoing practice that feeds back into the collective interpretation sessions. As the research progresses, profiles will be refined, new perception patterns will be incorporated, and our understanding of the narratives that structure the social, political, and cultural life of the region will be updated. All of this will be uploaded to the digital tool developed for this process, which will also allow for a more in-depth analysis of quotes and challenges extracted from the interviews.

3. **Intersectionality.** The analysis of the information collected will allow us to identify intersectional dimensions across age, gender, language, roots, economic sector, etc., in order to detect inequalities or biases that have an impact.

4. **Temporal evolution.** In this phase, we will also analyze the temporal evolution of the narratives. We will check whether there are changes in the dominant discourses between August and December and whether new discourses emerge linked to events related to the museum expansion project.

5.

Cross-referencing with the mapping of actors and initiatives. The mapping, which has so far identified 240 actors with 182 documented connections, 194 active initiatives, and the initiatives of the strategic plan, allows for a better assessment of the diversity of the ecosystem and the complementarity of actions at different levels of intervention. We propose an in-depth and systematic analysis of the narrative perception patterns identified, cross-referencing them with the mapping of actors and initiatives and developing segmentations. This allows us to detect gaps, synergies, and strategic projections for action. We will analyze each narrative perception pattern in terms of its alignment, contradiction, or complementarity with the mapped initiatives and their promoters, to identify blind spots, narratives without associated initiatives, and locate opportunities for coalition or synergies between agents with different positions but common concerns.

6.

Modeling future scenarios. The narratives will allow us to construct prospective scenarios to better understand possible citizen perceptions of the different suggestions put forward.

7.

International comparison seminar ALC[K], in collaboration with AC4-Columbia University, will hold a seminar with international experts before the end of the year to compare preliminary results and enrich the analysis with new perspectives.

8.

Presentation of the report. To conclude this phase, a report will be prepared and presented in early 2026 with the main findings gathered in 2025.

Appendice I
Methodology

★ New regulation mechanisms
★ New public services
★ Large scale initiatives
★ Small and mid scale initiatives
★ Community actions

Values and
Context

New
Narratives

Culture

Change

01
Systems
Mapping

02
Listening
Process

03
Collective
Sensemaking

04
Co-creation

05
Prototyping

06
Scalling

5
4
3
2
1

K
Cultural Factor

Systemic
Transformation

(1) Listening
The cultural dimension of transformation processes

Estas herramientas no operan de manera aislada, sino que se articulan en un proceso de aprendizaje iterativo, en el que cada fase alimenta al resto y permite reformular la investigación conforme avanza el análisis. No obstante, en esta investigación se aplicarán únicamente las tres primeras, ya que no se trata de acompañar un proceso de innovación social en marcha ni de llevar a cabo un proceso de co-creación.

En el ANEXO 1 de este informe (página 79) se detalla cada una de estas tres técnicas, comenzando por el mapeo, entendido como una herramienta fundamental para visualizar el ecosistema de innovación, identificar interconexiones y analizar brechas y oportunidades dentro del sistema.

En el abordaje del reto complejo del cambio climático y la transición energética, se ha tendido a separar los ámbitos de la sostenibilidad ecológica y el cambio social. O, dicho de otra forma, no se ha reparado lo suficiente en las múltiples transformaciones sociales que generan en las comunidades la crisis socio-ecológica y los esfuerzos que se están llevando a cabo para revertir la situación. Tendremos que aprender a gestionar con nuevas herramientas la interrelación entre los problemas medioambientales y las desigualdades sociales, económicas y territoriales.
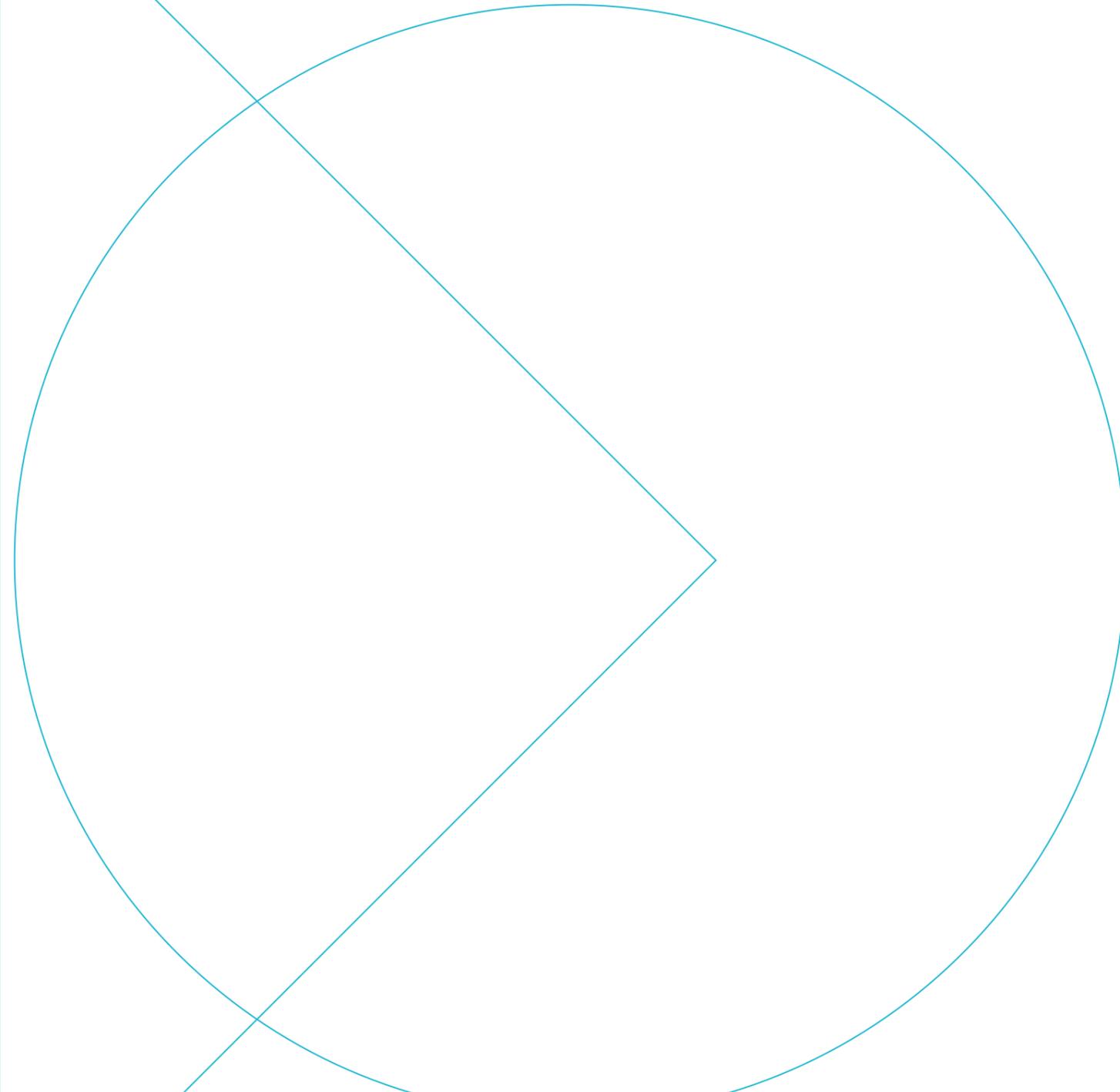
The aim of this listening process is to identify the various narratives and perceptions regarding the possible expansion of the Guggenheim Bilbao Museum in the Busturialdea region. These opinions may focus on this issue or cover other related topics that

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citizens consider relevant to the future of the region. The listening process has allowed each person to decide whether they wish to express specific opinions or more general reflections.

 A well-structured community listening process should combine various sources of information: interviews, focus groups, ethnographic observation, and quantitative data analysis, among other possibilities. The aim is to identify perception patterns in narratives, value nuances, and avoid simplifying existing opinions. This proposal has applied ethnographic tools to refine and segment public discourse, identify hidden narratives, and open a more constructive dialogue on this issue.

• What is a listening process?

The listening process is a tool that allows us to capture the narratives of a community in real time and understand how they influence the dynamics of social transformation. It is not just about collecting information, but about identifying the perceptions, meanings, and cultural constructs that structure how actors understand their reality and their capacity for change. Therefore, listening allows us not only to document the voices of the community, but also to integrate them into decision-making processes that are sustainable over time (Engle, 2018). This process is aligned with the framework of transformative innovation, which emphasizes the role of narratives and cultural values in shaping shared futures and opening spaces for experimentation (Diercks et al., 2019; Schot & Steinmueller, 2018).

In this sense, one of the main limitations of traditional rationalist

Modality	Definition and objectives	Potential	Limitations
Consultation	Tool for gathering opinions, assessments, or proposals from citizens or specific groups on a particular topic. Its purpose is to ascertain the position or preferences of the people consulted. (Font et al., 2012; OECD, 2001)	Short-term, clear, and decisive response.	Does not allow for nuances. Blocks and limits the possibility of dialogue.
Survey	Tool for collecting quantifiable data through structured questionnaires, generally with closed questions. Its objective is to measure attitudes, perceptions, or behaviors of a specific population (Creswell, 2014).	It provides statistical and quantitatively representative data.	It does not capture nuances or depth; responses are conditioned by the questions; risk of bias in the formulation or interpretation.
Participatory process	Collective dynamic in which people deliberate, propose, and make decisions about an issue or project. Its objective is the direct influence of citizens on planning and decision-making (Arnstein, 1969)	It allows citizens to be involved in decisions; it promotes shared responsibility.	The same people always participate: those who have time, training, or direct interests, leaving those who most need to be heard in the background. Organized groups or those with greater symbolic power dominate the space, over less articulate or "uncomfortable" voices. May generate false expectations: decisions are generally made outside the process.
Listening process	A qualitative approach that seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences, stories, perceptions, and narratives of a community. The aim is to gather perspectives for interpretation and analysis, without formulating proposals or direct decisions. (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Clifford & Marcus, 1986)	Allows the complexity and diversity of experiences to be captured; generates in-depth, contextualized knowledge; contributes to the construction of ethnographic profiles and collective narratives. (Geertz, 1973; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011)	It does not seek direct impact or immediate operational results; it has less political visibility if it does not translate into concrete proposals. (Marcus, 1995); it depends largely on who interprets the results.

Table 1. Comparative summary of four types of citizen participation—consultation, survey, participatory process, and listening process—according to their definition, objectives, potential, and limitations. Source: Prepared by the authors

approaches to public policy is their difficulty in capturing how communities interpret, in real time, the complex problems they face. Even when they include mechanisms such as surveys or focus groups, many programs designed exclusively from a technical-instrumental logic tend to disconnect from the aspirations, meanings, and cultural dynamics that truly mobilize social actors (Cottam, 2018). This disconnect also has to do with the fact that, in many institutions, qualitative data is still considered less valid than quantitative data, despite the fact that more and more studies show its value in understanding complex social problems (Thelwall & Nevill, 2021). The deep listening approach was born precisely as a response to this disconnect, seeking to integrate the voices and living narratives of the territory into the processes of analysis, decision-making, and policy design.

It should be noted that this is not a participatory process or a survey, but rather an exercise in listening and gathering qualitative perspectives. The main difference lies in the degree of intervention and expected impact. Unlike a participatory process, where people deliberate and make decisions, or a survey, which collects quantifiable data, this listening process seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences, stories, and perceptions of the territory. It is a qualitative approach, closer to ethnographic exploration.

In this case, the main objective of the listening process is to identify existing narratives in all their diversity. The narratives will be captured in the form of ethnographic profiles, which will be enriched and evolved throughout the process and contrasted in collective interpretations.

• The importance of narratives

Narratives are not individual discourses, but collective constructions that reproduce, question, and transform the sociocultural context

in which they emerge (Balasch & Montenegro, 2003). Narratives are studied on the basis of ethnographic profiles, which are not based on purely demographic criteria, but on shared patterns of perception and behavior. This implies recognizing that narratives can be contradictory to each other, but that they all operate within the same system. There is no single true narrative, but rather multiple perspectives that must be understood in their partiality and location (Haraway, 1988). Rather than reflecting in a simplistic way, it opens up spaces for interpretation and understanding of how different narratives shape social reality (Haraway, 1988; Balasch & Montenegro, 2003). This contrasts with positivist views that seek a universal truth and relativist positions that invalidate any structured analysis.

This listening process has identified a series of perception patterns based on the main ideas extracted from individual testimonies. Although this process has focused primarily on dialogues and interviews, we have used other complementary listening channels (participatory observation and analysis of secondary sources).

In this process, we have used six different parameters (similarity, difference, frequency, correlation, causality, and intensity) to distinguish between different levels of narrative: surface narrative, hidden narrative, and metanarrative. Surface narrative corresponds to opinions that are openly expressed but do not always reflect the way actors behave. Hidden narratives include implicit beliefs that can be detected in discourse, even if they are not directly verbalized.

Metanarratives constitute the deep values that structure the way a community perceives the possibility of change and the power relations that define its context. Identifying these metanarratives is essential for understanding the ideological frameworks that condition the formulation and reception of the listening object, allowing not only a deeper analysis of existing narratives, but also the detection of key points for social transformation.

• Snowball sampling

Snowball research is one of the most popular sampling methods in qualitative research. According to Atkinson & Flint (2001), its main added value is that it enriches the process with the voices of people who are not part of formal or structured networks. These are usually the opinions that are most difficult to identify or that are hidden. Researchers usually start with a small number of initial contacts (seeds) who meet the research criteria and are invited to participate. Participants are then asked to recommend other contacts who meet the research criteria and who may also be willing to participate, who in turn recommend other potential participants, and so on. Researchers use their social networks to establish the first links, from which the sampling momentum develops, capturing an ever-growing chain of participants. Sampling usually ends once saturation point is reached.

This is the point at which opinions, even if they come from different networks, are repeated and no significant nuances are found between the narratives collected. In this listening process, the narratives collected through "snowball sampling" have been analyzed in contrasting spaces to ensure that no voice has been left out of the process and that the networks have not conditioned the content. Thus, snowball sampling operates within real social networks, which makes it particularly useful for understanding relational ecosystems, trust dynamics, and marginal narratives, unlike quantitative (random, stratified) sampling, which seeks statistical representativeness but at the expense of losing the complexity and depth that emerges from social interactions and invisible connections, interpreting the population as a homogeneous aggregate.

Binding or non-binding?

Unlike a survey or a participatory process, the nature of a listening process is not instrumental but interpretative. Listening seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of perceptions, stories, and cultural frameworks that are not predefined. Its objective is to explore and analyze how reality is experienced and understood from within, integrating situated subjectivities and not seeking statistical representativeness. Its strength lies in opening up reality to new meanings and hidden narratives. It is not a participatory process or a vote, but rather an exercise in narrative understanding that enriches interpretation and allows deep perceptions and convictions to be identified. None of these techniques is better than another; they all have their advantages and limitations.

Modality	Definition and objectives	Potential	Limitations
Simple random sampling	Quantitative technique in which all individuals in the population have the same probability of being selected. Its objective is to obtain a representative and extrapolatable sample. (Creswell, 2014)	Allows results to be generalized to the total population; minimizes selection bias; is statistically robust.	May ignore network dynamics and context; difficult access to invisible or reluctant populations; requires a comprehensive sampling frame that is difficult to obtain in complex contexts. Samples subject to pre-established interpretations of representativeness.
Stratified sampling	Quantitative technique that divides the population into subgroups (strata) and selects proportional samples from each. Its objective is to ensure the representation of all relevant subgroups. (Creswell, 2014)	Ensures representation of minorities or specific subgroups; increases statistical accuracy compared to simple random sampling.	Requires detailed prior information about the population; may overrepresent artificial categories; does not capture relational dynamics or contextual narratives. Samples subject to pre-set interpretations of representativeness.
Snowball sampling	Qualitative method where initial participants (seeds) recommend new contacts, expanding the network until saturation is reached. Its objective is to capture voices that are difficult to access or not visible in formal networks. (Atkinson & Flint, 2001)	Allows access to hidden or marginalized people; builds trust and access through relational closeness; favors the collection of diverse and contextual narratives.	Risk of network bias (only circulates in certain social circles); not statistically representative; may exclude voices outside the initial networks; depends on personal trust.

Table 2. Sampling strategies in social research: definitions, potentialities, and limitations. Based on Creswell (2014) and Atkinson and Flint (2001). Own elaboration

(2) Mapping
Networks and relationships in complex systems

Every listening process requires prior analysis to identify the key actors who need to be heard and to visualize their interactions. This visualization system must be able to be updated throughout the listening process. This is very important to avoid duplication and ensure that no relevant actors are left out of the process. This exercise also makes it possible to identify the power relations and interests that exist around the issue. Digital tools currently exist to visualize this mapping and update it in real time.

Mapping within evolutionary assessment is not conceived as an isolated exercise, but as a tool that dialogues with the following phases of analysis and as an iterative and continuous practice that must be updated throughout the process to reflect changes in the ecosystem. It is closely linked to the listening process, which allows the narratives and perceptions of the mapped actors to be captured, and to collective interpretation, in which the findings are contrasted with different key actors to validate their analysis. This interconnection between techniques ensures that mapping is not only an initial diagnosis, but also a tool for continuous monitoring and adjustment, adapting to changes in the ecosystem. In addition, this methodological tool connects with the need to approach policies from a systemic perspective, capable of detecting bottlenecks, key actors, and institutional configurations that limit or enable transformative change (Weber & Rohracher, 2012).

Mapping follows a series of structured steps. First, agents and initiatives are identified, and a list of key actors and projects is drawn up. Next, actors are classified according to their role within the ecosystem, followed by an analysis of interconnections, where existing relationships and opportunities to generate new connections are identified. All this information is systematized in the digital tool enabled for this process (www.urdaibai.agirrecenter.eus), allowing for continuous consultation and updating. With all this, the data is contrasted through collective interpretation sessions, in which the findings are validated or not, and the mapping is completed with the actors involved.

The visualization of the network of agents and initiatives has two key objectives: to understand the diversity of the ecosystem of agents and to delve deeper into the typology of these initiatives.

From a theoretical perspective, the mapping approach draws on Latour's actor-network theory, which argues that social systems cannot be analyzed solely from the perspective of their individual actors, but rather from the relationships they establish with each other (Larrión, 2019). In this way, mapping not only provides a cartography of the ecosystem, but also allows us to understand how connections have evolved and what factors have influenced their transformation. This approach is in line with frameworks for systemic change in impact investing, which suggest mapping and articulating multiple initiatives not for their individual returns, but for their joint contribution to the transformation of the system.

Following the perspective of systemic mapping, this approach reinforces the importance of structured and participatory analysis of complex systems. Ecosystem mapping not only allows for the visual representation of interactions between actors, but also facilitates the identification of gaps and opportunities within the system. In addition, it helps reveal the underlying dynamics within a social ecosystem and allows for a better understanding of strategic points

of intervention. In this sense, mapping not only helps to describe existing structures, but also allows us to understand how these structures evolve and what mechanisms can facilitate change within the system (Barbrook-Johnson and Penn, 2022). Furthermore, this approach facilitates the co-creation of adaptive strategies in contexts of high uncertainty, allowing the actors involved to identify more effective opportunities for intervention.

On the other hand, social network analysis and Burt's (2015) theory of "structural holes" provide an additional perspective on the value of mapping. According to this theory, actors who occupy intermediary positions in a network can access novel information and connect nodes that would otherwise be disconnected.

Therefore, in addition to being a diagnostic exercise, mapping is a tool that promotes not only social research but also strategic decision-making within social innovation processes. By identifying key points of intervention in the system, it allows for the prioritization of interventions that have a transformative impact, avoiding duplication and strengthening synergies between existing initiatives.

(3) Collective interpretation
Real-time democratic deepening

The information collected was interpreted collaboratively in five contrast sessions held in Gernika, Bermeo, Murueta, Ibarrangelua, and Elantxobe. The process of open deliberation is key to moving from the confrontation of exclusionary narratives to the generation of diverse but compatible discourses. The logic of collective interpretation is that the narratives, challenges, and opportunities identified in the listening processes among all participants are reinterpreted, especially through visualizations of the perception patterns identified, highlighting similarities and discrepancies. The main objective of these sessions has been to correct errors of interpretation, add new nuances, and incorporate missing ideas.

Potential and limitations of deliberative spaces

Modality	Definition and objectives	Potential	Limitations
Focus group	A structured meeting of a small group of people to explore perceptions, beliefs, and experiences through group interaction on a specific topic. Its objective is to generate discussion and delve deeper into shared or divergent narratives.	Allows consensus and dissent to be identified; encourages interaction and the comparison of experiences; generates rich qualitative data.	Risk that some voices will dominate the conversation; possible group pressure; results not statistically generalizable.
Citizen forum	An open space for public deliberation where diverse people express their perspectives and reflect collectively on issues of common interest. Its objective is to broaden the plurality of voices and involve more people in the construction of shared meaning.	Promotes inclusion and diversity of voices; facilitates collective reflection; reinforces a sense of community and belonging.	Difficulty managing large groups; possible tensions between opposing positions; limited impact if there are no follow-up mechanisms or translation into action.
Collective interpretation	Collaborative process of analysis and interpretation of previously collected narratives and data, integrating multiple perspectives to construct shared meanings and collective understandings of a reality or territory.	Promotes collective ownership of knowledge; enhances empathy and mutual understanding; provides depth and contextualized interpretive richness.	It can be perceived as abstract or impractical; requires facilitation skills; does not necessarily lead to direct decisions or actions.

Table 3. Qualitative modalities of participation and collective analysis: definition, potentialities, and limitations. References: Krueger & Casey (2015); Font & Blanco (2007); OECD (2001); Denzin & Lincoln (2011); Balasch & Montenegro (2003); Chambers (1994).

Collective interpretation is a key process within the listening process, as it allows the findings obtained in mapping and listening to be compared and validated. This process involves diverse actors, including those who have participated in the listening process, and encourages a shared analysis of the information. Through this technique, the aim is not only to legitimize the results, but also to generate new interpretations and new lines of listening. This interpretive dimension is essential to give direction to listening processes. This process should not be understood as a one-off event, but as a practice that is repeated many times throughout the research.

From a methodological perspective, collective interpretation can be understood as a space for deliberation in which, on the one hand, mapping is presented and, on the other, the narratives identified (through ethnographic profiles) in the listening phase are confronted, which are often contradictory or far removed from objective data.

The confrontation of narratives allows not only to cross-reference existing actions with the perceptions of the actors, but also to identify gaps and opportunities that could guide new strategies. As Haraway (1988) points out, all evaluation is conditioned by the point of view of the person carrying it out, which makes it essential that the analysis be contrasted and enriched by multiple voices.

In these collective interpretation sessions, the challenges and opportunities identified in the listening process were presented, using ethnographic profiles to highlight similarities and discrepancies between different segments of the population. This exercise has several fundamental objectives: to induce learning from collective experience, to draw conclusions, to incorporate new approaches to analysis, to strengthen the network of participants, and to validate the research process. Therefore, these contrast sessions not only validate the analysis carried out, but also allow for the identification of blind spots and the reformulation of the research in dialogue with the actors themselves, following a participatory logic that has been applied in other projects promoted with this same methodological approach. This methodological approach avoids the imposition of rigid analytical frameworks, aligning itself with St. Pierre's post-

qualitative approach (cited in Guttorm et al., 2015), which advocates keeping research in a state of constant questioning.

Furthermore, following Bourdieu (1999), it is crucial to consider the possible presence of symbolic violence in the interpretation of data. This concept refers to subtle forms of domination that operate through language and social structure, causing certain narratives to be internalized as natural without being questioned. Collective interpretation seeks precisely to minimize these biases, promoting a space where actors can express their perceptions without prior conditioning. Following this logic, it is not enough to make explicit the positions of those who analyze the data; it is also necessary to examine their implications and the power relations that shape the knowledge production process (Biglia and Vergés-Bosch, 2016).

From an intersectional perspective, a homogeneous view of social actors cannot be assumed, as factors such as gender, social class, and origin condition access to and participation in innovation processes (Viveros, 2016). For this reason, collective interpretation seeks to integrate diverse voices and experiences, avoiding the reproduction of structural inequalities. Beyond being a validation mechanism, this process becomes a strategy for democratizing knowledge production and questioning power structures.

Collective interpretation sessions will be repeated throughout the listening process and are structured around different key elements. The first step is to present the process carried out so far, including the findings from the mapping and listening exercises. Next, a series of guided questions are posed to facilitate comparison.

Do you recognize these perception patterns? Do you see yourself reflected in them? What are we missing? How many and what initiatives respond to the needs identified in these profiles? Who else should we talk to?

These questions seek to generate a dialogue in which attendees can contribute their own views on the results obtained. It is also important that the sessions have a diverse range of participants, balancing aspects such as gender and age. The number of participants has not exceeded 15 to ensure effective participation and encourage debate. The sessions lasted 90 minutes, allowing for the exchange of ideas without the discussion losing momentum.

The sessions were recorded, transcribed, and photographed. The participants in these sessions were individuals and organizations that contributed their narratives to the listening process, as well as other organizations or individuals who had not participated.

Collective interpretation is a methodological process that goes beyond the simple validation of findings. It is a space where different perspectives intersect, dominant narratives are questioned, and new meanings are constructed together. Ultimately, the most transformative innovation processes do not emerge from the isolated actions of individual agents, but from collaborative ecosystems where knowledge and decision-making are constructed collectively (Mazzucato, 2014). From this perspective, participatory methodologies allow us to move from an approach focused on what is mine to one based on what is ours, recognizing that innovation is only possible through collaborative processes that are open to diverse experiences and knowledge.

Appendice II Glossary of terms

Territorial agents

People, groups, and institutions that intervene in or are affected by processes of change in Urdaibai. Identifying them is key to mapping power relations, alliances, and tensions in the territory.

Affective atmosphere

Emotional climate shared by those who inhabit the territory. Frustration, enthusiasm, mistrust, or hope are not incidental elements, but forces that condition social dynamics, collective projects, and the willingness to change.

Environmental conflicts

Disputes over land use, natural resources, or conservation, reflecting tensions between values, identities, and development models. In Urdaibai, these conflicts trigger deep narratives and affect local governance.

Sustainable human development

A model that prioritizes collective well-being, equity, and ecological sustainability. It is not limited to economic growth, but promotes an integrated vision of progress based on social justice and territorial balance.

Semi-structured interviews

In-depth conversations, guided by thematic axes, which allow personal and collective stories to be captured. They are the main tool of the listening process.

Developmental evaluation

A real-time analysis system adapted to complex contexts. It accompanies transitions by capturing contradictions, lessons learned, and changes in perception, and facilitates flexible decision-making.

Collaborative governance

A decision-making model in which citizens, institutions, and social agents co-produce knowledge and share responsibilities. Key in contexts where no single party has the complete solution.

Collective interpretation

A deliberative space where narratives and findings are contrasted among diverse agents. Rather than validating, it seeks to build shared meanings and open new lines of listening.

Metanarratives

Deep structures of meaning that underpin what a community considers possible, legitimate, or desirable. They condition visible and hidden narratives and are fundamental to understanding resistance to or support for change.

Ecosystem mapping

Identification of actors, relationships, discourses, initiatives, and conflicts present in the territory. More than a diagnosis, it is a living tool that allows us to understand how the system evolves.

Development model

The dominant vision of how the territory should be transformed. It can be explicit or implicit, and comes into tension with other proposals that struggle to impose their own narrative of the future.

Tourism model

Underlying logic in how visitors are attracted and managed. In Urdaibai, mass, regenerative, cultural, and sustainable models clash, with direct implications for the economic, social, and ecological fabric.

Snowball sampling

A qualitative technique that allows access to invisible or peripheral voices through chains of recommendation. Useful for capturing marginal narratives and building trust.

Narratives

Shared stories that express how a community understands its present and projects its future. They are collective constructions that emerge from experiences, values, and imaginaries, not simply individual opinions.

Layers of narrative depth

• Visible narrative: what is said openly, even if it is not always practiced.

• Hidden narrative: latent, non-explicit ideas that underlie discourse.

• Metanarrative: deep beliefs about what is possible, legitimate, or desirable that guide thought and action.

Listening process

Qualitative methodology focused on gaining an in-depth understanding of the experiences, values, and perceptions of the community. It goes beyond asking questions: it interprets, segments, and returns the narratives collected to open up possibilities for transformation.

Biosphere Reserve

International recognition that defines Urdaibai as an area of active conservation. It represents a tension between ecological protection and human development, and acts as a constant reference point in the narratives of the territory.

Complex social challenges

Problems that have no single solution, where social, ecological, cultural, and political factors converge. They require collaborative, adaptive approaches based on collective intelligence.

Socio-ecological transitions

Profound changes in the way we produce, live, and relate to the environment. These are processes of systemic transformation that involve both structures and subjectivities.

Appendice III
About the digital tool

The process support tool **urdaibai.agirrecenter.eus** allows real-time data to be visualized in a simple and interactive way. It is available to the general public free of charge, and anyone can access it to explore information on different thematic areas. The platform displays data through easy-to-understand graphs, maps, and tables, and is constantly updated to provide the latest information.

This tool allows anyone interested to follow the process in real time. It has a module for mapping agents, initiatives, and strategic plans, with a listening module and a collective interpretation module. During the initial phases, we have uploaded the verbatim transcripts of the conversations and the profiles analyzed. In later phases, we will be able to provide greater depth to the analysis with new features that will allow us to delve deeper into the spectrum of existing narratives about the region.

The information is public and open at all times, but anonymized through codes. The traceability of quotes will also be studied so that no one can identify the participants. This way of working brings legitimacy and transparency to the process.

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